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RELIGION IN STUDENT LIFE

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It has often been said that the students of the world are its most homogeneous class—that the bonds of common interests and common characteristics which unite the students of all countries are stronger than the differences of race and language that divide them. The truth that underlies this statement soon becomes apparent to any student or professor whose work takes him to the universities of other countries than his own. He comes to feel himself at home far sooner within those academic walls than in the more radically foreign world outside; for there he finds the same common interests, the same prevalent type of mind, the same general point of view, that he had shared with his own college mates at home. Not simply are the subjects studied, the recognized authorities consulted, the intellectual problems faced, much the same the world around; but the approach and attitude of students toward all these and toward life in general is everywhere largely similar. The optimism that faces forward, the enthusiasm that forgets itself, the openmindedness that seeks for truth everywhere, the impatience of tradition that is not slow to reject conventional opinions on matters outside college concerns, coupled with the homage to academic tradition that insists on exact obedience to accepted opinions and practices in college affairs—these characteristics are common to students and student life in all countries. The republic of letters, at least in its academic capitals, is cosmopolitan and worldwide.

At the same time, students of different countries are by no means exactly alike. Their differences of character and personality may be veiled somewhat by their common intellectual pursuits and the common characteristics of youth; but the veil is not so thick as to obscure wholly their racial and temperamental traits. The students of different nations, in other words, differ as their

nations differ, but not so much. It is the purpose of this article to consider in a general way some of these differences between the students and the student life of some of our western nations, particularly as these differences bear on the moral and religious life of students. Later articles will study more in detail the religious life of single institutions.

It is natural to expect that in the older European countries, where social evolution has been going on for centuries, the status and the individuality of the student class should be more sharply defined than in the newer countries of America. That this is actually so, few Americans who have ever studied in Europe will doubt. The more definite stratification into social classes that prevails in most European nations has given to the student class a distinctiveness which it does not yet possess in more democratic America. Its costume may be different from that of other classes in the community, and its customs, codes of conduct, and privileges certainly are different. Entrance into it may be traditionally limited to certain social classes, as in England, and this limitation may even receive the explicit sanction of academic law, as in Germany. The careers open to students when they leave the universities are in Europe usually well defined, and the way into them is made at least direct and clear, even if not always easy, by custom or by law. The well-known saying of Bismarck, that one-third of the students of his nation are moral failures, one-third intellectual failures, and that the other third rule Germany, illustrates at once the distinctive characteristics and privileges of student life in the European country where they are most fully developed.

But this external distinctiveness of the student class is in most European countries even exceeded by its inner distinctiveness of temper and character when it is at its best. The inherited intellectual discipline of centuries has given it a wide outlook and a clear and fair perspective of life that other classes, as well as the students of newer countries, largely lack. The emphasis on the duty of every student to face and think out for himself the world-old problems of humanity has developed among European students, far more than anywhere else, mature and individual personalities with strongly marked convictions, and characteristics

that may even border on the eccentric. The habit of severe and critical thinking on fundamental problems has cultivated among European students an intellectual keenness and power that one hardly finds elsewhere. The responsibilities which public sentiment and national custom put upon them have trained them to a sense of obligation to the nation and to a capacity for public leadership, which an American cannot but covet for the students of his own country. Of course there are weaklings and failures among students there as here, and many of them. But in outlook and insight, in mature individuality, in intellectual power, and in readiness for responsible leadership, the European student of the best type is usually far ahead of his American cousin.

American students, on the other hand, show clearly some of our well-marked national characteristics, modified more or less by academic tradition and influence according as the section of the country is older or newer. In general, the American student in the eastern states is naturally more like his European cousin, while the western student shares more fully the characteristics and interests that are distinctive of Americans and American life. The optimistic and contagious enthusiasm that Europeans usually single out as an essentially American possession finds some of its most striking expressions in our student life, as the athletics and the religion of students alike bear witness. The proneness to mass movements, which goes so naturally with this enthusiasm, running as it often does into fads and crazes, is a characteristic which the American student shares with most of us, his fellow-countrymen. His strong bent toward practical and executive affairs, and his comparative lack of interest in distinctive and particularly in difficult intellectual problems, distinguish him from the European student but unite him with most of his fellow-Americans. Perhaps the most conspicuous difference between American and European students, however, lies in the realm of the development of personality; the European student is usually a much more mature individual, with more distinctive traits and opinions and convictions all his own than is the American undergraduate. A German university man who had returned to his own country after teaching among us for many years made this comment: "Why, your American students

are all alike." His statement was doubtless exaggerated, but that it contains a large element of truth, few who know American college life would be disposed to deny. The example and the opinion of a few undergraduate leaders set a fashion in most American colleges for everything from clothes to convictions, which soon becomes a test of orthodoxy for the great majority of students in that college, and which only the stronger spirits among them have the individuality to resist.

The natural consequences of these characteristic differences between American and European students work themselves out in all phases of student life and activity. Before we turn to the moral and religious realms which are the particular province of this series of articles, it may be suggestive to note some of these consequences in the more general field which we Americans call "college life." It is significant that this phrase itself, as well as the thing it denotes, has developed most fully and definitely among our American colleges. The "college life" of the students at the German universities, where there are no dormitories or campus in our sense, but only one or perhaps two or three great lecture-halls, is according to our American ideas very limited. To be sure, all the world knows that the German student has his dueling, his student traditions and customs hoary with age and perennial with interest, his unrivaled student songs and singing, his student social organizations as widespread and distinctive as our fraternities, with emblems and excursions and enthusiasm of which his well-known bibulous habits are rather an expression than a cause. But of the athletics which bulks so large in our "college life," and of the endless organizations for the cultivation of all sorts of interests and purposes within the university, German students have far less than we, and sometimes almost nothing at all. The English student has much more of what we call "college life" than the German, particularly at Oxford and Cambridge, where he has quite as much as we. But English college life is as a rule much more spontaneous, personal, and unorganized than ours. Like English rugby as contrasted with American football, it "gets itself together" on the field rather than in preliminary organization and training, and evolves its tactics and machinery in actual play rather than by

previous planning and preparation. The elaborate complexity of modern American college life, with its endless organizations for all sorts of purposes, would be a great distraction to the German student and a great burden to the English. To be sure, this minutely organized college life gives the American student unusual opportunities for the development of our national gift for executive and administrative leadership, and it brings him a rare good time for four "bright college years, with pleasure rife." At the same time, it can hardly be denied that it leaves him less time than his German or English cousin has or takes for serious intellectual work. Further, many of us are inclined to confess that most American students, like most American people, have by taste and temperament less native interest in, and gift for, purely intellectual work and problems than our older relatives across the sea. Thus has come about the generally recognized situation in our American student life which ex-President Wilson, of Princeton, well described when he said that "the trouble with our colleges is that the main show has become a side show, and the side shows have been turned into the main show."

But the chief purpose and main interest of this article is to study the moral and religious life of students in the light of these general characteristics. Considering first the moral standards and ideals of student life, we find, as we might expect, more uncompromising strictness among American students, and more serious ethical thinking and individuality of conviction across the Atlantic. There are of course many and conspicuous exceptions to a statement so general as this: many of the students in some American colleges, and some of them in all, are quite as liberal if not lax in their moral practice as any students in countries where student vices are more notorious; and a great many European students give as little personal thought to moral issues as the most careless undergraduates here. But the writer of this article still remembers his surprise when a German school boy in his middle 'teens said to him one day in regard to a question of personal ethics: "I don't know yet what I do think about that problem. My parents think thus, my friends so. I shall steer clear of that issue until I am clear in my own mind about it." One wonders how many college students of

other countries, to say nothing of high-school boys of his age, take moral problems as seriously and carefully as that. Whether most American students do so, seems to the writer very doubtful. Face to face with the familiar moral issues of student life, some maintain uncompromisingly, but perhaps sometimes indiscriminatingly, the traditional standards in which they were brought up at home; others fall passively in with the practices of their college friends; only a few refuse to act pro or con until their own convictions are clear. No doubt the first two classes are found across the Atlantic as well. But it was the writer's general observation that the English and particularly the German students whom he knew, quite aside from the question as to what their moral convictions were, held those convictions as a result of more serious thought and personal resolution than did his American college mates.

The interest in social questions and social duties which is so marked a feature of modern life in all our occidental nations is strongly reflected everywhere among students. The differences in the response of the students of different countries to this universal call to social service are characteristic and most interesting. The American student calls a conference on social service, launches a campaign for volunteers with great enthusiasm, visits all the settlements in the neighborhood and offers to supply them with more workers, starts at least one independent boys' club, and has all the statistics of the number of social workers in his college out in an annual report almost before some of them have actually begun to work. The German student, if in his pronounced individualism he gets interested in social questions at all, is likely to approach them as a theoretical critic of Marx and a political enemy of the Social Democracy in German politics, or as a student of the historical development of the social problem; of concrete practical social service he has so far attempted almost nothing. The English student happily combines the intellectual interest of the German with the practical devotion of the American, and the university settlements which are the result of his social consecration are justly world-famous. As compared with our American students, he seems usually to go about his social service more quietly, and yet more thoroughly. One finds the finest type of Oxford under-

graduate devoting part or even the whole of a vacation to work in a London settlement, without saying a word about it to any save his most intimate friends. The next winter one is likely to find that same undergraduate an active member of the Fabian Society, the large and influential organization at Oxford for the study and propagation of Socialism of the Fabian type; and if one happen in to one of the weekly debates of the Oxford Union, there may be the same man vigorously supporting the latest Liberal Government measure for old-age pensions or workingmen's insurance. Thus devoted, intelligent, and politically efficient is the deep interest in social problems and social service among English students.

It is in the sphere of personal religion, however, that the differences between American, English, and German students are most evident and interesting. Here again, and perhaps especially, it is absolutely necessary to concede in advance that there are conspicuous exceptions to all general statements; there are many American students and even American universities that approximate to the English or even the German type, and also individuals and even colleges in Europe that are much like our own. But to anyone who has observed with sympathetic interest the religious life of the students of these three countries from the inside, certain well-marked differences clearly emerge.

These differences are perhaps most obvious in matters of theological thinking. Conformably with their marked intellectual bent and individual development, most German students have definite opinions about religion that, whether favorable or unfavorable, are at least their own. The seriousness with which the best type of German student faces and carries through the formidable task of working out his personal *Weltanschauung*, and the independent impartiality with which he examines and appraises the opinions of other and famous authorities in working out his own, can only command admiration. It is a common mistake in America to suppose that all Germans, whether students, professors, or ministers, are at least very liberal and usually decidedly radical in their theological views. The truth is that conservative opinions in theology have defenders as warm and erudite and intellectually keen as the more widely known liberal theology possesses. In

England and in Scotland one also finds among students much of the same serious interest in the intellectual justification and defense of religion; and it is an inspiration to find, particularly at Oxford, some of the most brilliant of the younger dons, not only in theology but in philosophy as well, devoting much time to interviews, lectures, and books on the intellectual defense of religion in the modern world. One wishes that we had more of such men and of such interest in America; for it often seems as if our American students, either through indifference to religion on the one hand, or through an intellectually superficial satisfaction with conventional solutions of its problems on the other, were doing less hard thinking on the subject than the needs of the times and their own responsibilities as educated leaders of public opinion demand. Our American students need more theological thinking and not less.

National differences are almost as striking in the realm of personal religious experience. The American student is frank and unreserved in the expression of his deepest religious feelings and purposes to a degree that the German thinks almost sacrilegious, and that even to the Englishman is most surprising. It is very difficult indeed to get a German student to say much about his deepest faiths and hopes; so difficult indeed that one is often in danger of the mistaken conclusion that he has none; and this difficulty is further increased by the ineradicable German disposition to debate theology when anyone else begins to talk religion. The American student stands at the other extreme. If he is interested in religion at all, he likes to share his religious experiences and ideas with his fellows; and the more men he can share them with, the stronger he finds them. He studies the Bible in a devotional group with other men, using the same detailed courses of study which thousands of men like himself all over the country are pursuing. He finds it helpful to express his religious aspirations in a devotional meeting; and he receives his most powerful religious impulses when, in company with hundreds of other students, he sings rousing songs and listens to a moving address by some favorite speaker to students at a great assembly or convention of students. Here again it is the Englishman, with his native genius for compromise, that seems to strike the happy medium. He is less

reserved than the German in matters of religion, and has a strong religious life of his own which he is not unwilling to talk about or express. He does not undervalue conferences or social meetings; but he finds them most valuable as occasions for prayer, particularly for silent prayer, and most of all for united silent prayer. By far the most impressive feature of the religious life of English students is their personal sense of the reality of the spiritual world, and their profound belief in prayer. At Oxford one discovers groups of the ablest men in the university meeting by set appointment each noon, and at other times for special purposes, for united intercession which as often as not is silent. It was this most significant situation which a young Oxford tutor had in mind when he said not long ago that a religious movement was under way at Oxford the results of which no man could foresee, but which might ultimately prove to be as significant in religious history as the Oxford movement of the last century has been.

All these differences stand out with special clearness at the student summer conferences which are now held in all three countries. The German conferences are short, and markedly theological in tone; current questions of religious thought are presented by well-known leaders, and then generally discussed; and the discussion is continued by individuals on the long walking-excursions into the country that the German student loves. The American summer conference is a prolonged whirlwind of meetings and sectional conferences that parallel or succeed one another in bewildering profusion according to the rigid dictates of a complex schedule. The delegate, who has often come at no little personal sacrifice, hurries from one session to the next every morning and evening for ten crowded days, and throws himself into carefully organized athletics every afternoon with the same enthusiasm. He gets an abundance of practical training for actual Christian work, carries away a notebook filled with new methods and suggestions, and catches his inspiration by contagion. The English summer conference is a prolonged period for leisurely meditation, personal fellowship, and intensive inspiration. Its recreations, like many of its meetings, are spontaneous and unorganized. Most of its delegates would prefer an hour's discussion of a religious question, or a

period of silent prayer out under the trees, to attendance on any meeting in the ten days' program. It is not specially effective as a training-school, but always powerful as a personal inspiration.

It is in the organization of his religious activities and work that the American student comes fully to his own. In executive and practical efficiency, in "bringing things to pass," he has no equal among the students of the world. He has developed in practically every one of the hundreds of colleges in America a vigorous and efficient Young Men's Christian Association; and these are federated in a strong national brotherhood. The traveling and local secretaries of these associations have led the way to impressive results in the enlistment of students for Bible- and mission-study, in the securing of volunteers for missionary service, and in the definite presentation to students of the claims of Jesus Christ. Though the German student may be a keener thinker, and the English student may have a deeper and more rounded personal life, the American student has been and is an energetic and devoted worker for the kingdom of God. Much as he has to learn from the students of other nations, he has also much to give. It was at American initiative that the World's Student Christian Federation was organized in 1894; and through its agency German, English, and American students are now co-operating to advance the cause of Christ among the students of the world.